1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OF5 Alor OF5

Chapter 2

The Setting

131 ALOR is a small and obscure island in the Netherlands East Indies. It lies directly north of central Timor at the end of that long string of land fragments called the Lesser Sundas. More specifically, it is 8 degrees south of the equator and between 124 degrees and 125 degrees longitude east of Greenwich. This places it about halfway between Java and New Guinea in an east-west line and about halfway between Australia and Celebes in a north-south line.

132 Alor's climate and vegetation reflect its proximity to the Australian land mass. There are prevailing southeast and northwest winds, with severe monsoon storms as the winds change. The wet season begins with a few thunder showers at the end of October, then works up to a crescendo in January, February, and March, when rains fall in a steady downpour each afternoon, sending spates rushing down the deeply
221 gouged river canyons. This is the period of planting and intensive weeding.

[33] With the gradual cessation of the rains the temperature falls slightly, and as the rainy season ends, first corn, then rice and beans are harvested. Later still comes the sweet potato season. By the end of the dry season the whole countryside is brown and parched, and finally many of the springs and small rivers dry up. The only important crop of this period is cassava. At this time natives burn over the land to destroy the weeds they have been cutting in their fields and to drive wild pig for communal hunts. Little survives the annual burning-over except eucal-
137 yptus trees and a kind of blady grass known throughout the Indies as alang alang.

Alor is therefore not lush jungle country. Rich tropical growth is found only in the ravines where there is moisture the year round and where the land is too steep for cultivation—and to natives, land too steep for cultivation means nothing short of the perpendicular.

133 The terrain is so precipitous that one drops easily into accepting it
134 as an explanation for the remarkable diversity of language and culture on this small island. Alor is only about fifty miles long and thirty wide, but it supports a native population of approximately seventy thousand,
[17] who speak innumerable dialects of at least eight different languages.
101 Abui is the name given the language of the area from which most of the subsequent descriptive data were drawn. It is fifty miles from the

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[He wanted to begin with other data I had asked him to collect. When I asked him to begin with his own story there was a very long pause. I felt much resistance this day. Was he punishing me for not accepting his bid of the preceding day for food and nurture?]

When I was small an old man from Kewai, called Maugfani, came to stay with us. He was my father's Male House. He used to sit by the fire and doze. He would fall over and then wake up and say, "*Na lakieli.*" ["Indeed, I was dreaming." In local dialect this would be *na la pieli.* Such dialectic variations were always cause for much laughter and ridicule.] He was very old and all the time he was there my mother fed him pounded corn. [Question.] He stayed several months and then returned. [Question.] I liked him because I was still small. I called him grandfather.

One time Alomale, Fanlani, Maraima, and Kolfani [all siblings or cousins] were staying with mother and father. I was still small. Alomale and Fanlani went to hunt rats near the Limbur ravine. A rat went down a very steep slope. Alomale followed it and rolled down the slope. He was dead. People carried him to Mainmelang. Many women cried for him. But when he got back to Mainmelang he came to life again.

Fanlani's wife was Tilamau. I was still so small I couldn't talk clearly. Tilamau fondled me and took me to a dance. She danced holding me in her scarf. [Question.] I myself remember this [i.e., it was not hearsay].

When Fanlani died Tilamau wanted Alomale, but Alomale stole three small ears of corn from Lakamobi's garden. Lakamobi took Tilamau as wife to pay the debt, just for three small ears of corn. Now Lakamobi doesn't pay Tilamau's bride-price. He just took her. [Inaccurate.]

One time father, I, and Kolaka's husband, Mailang of Hatoberka, were all at Hatoberka. The three of us went down into the ravine to get crabs. A young spirit bird flew up. Mailang shot and missed. He shot all his arrows. Then father gave him his bird arrow and he hit the bird. When we got back to Hatoberka, Ataboi bought the spirit bird and cooked and pounded corn. We ate. Father got a Vifal moko as the second seller of the bird.

Once we were near Fiyaipe cutting a garden. Three men were sharing the work and the crop. At burning time we went down to the river to hunt for crayfish and eels near the place called Talmang. We drained a pool and got an eel about the size of my wrist. Then we saw another as big as my calf. Fanlaka shot it and jumped into the water after it. We